



AMIGOS DE RED

[Inicio de sesión](#)[Registro](#)[Accede a través de Facebook](#)Idioma [EN](#) [DE](#) [ES](#) [NL](#) [SE](#)[Contacto](#)[Búsqueda](#)
[Información de viajes](#) [Alojamiento](#) [Nuestra Gente y lugares](#) [Amigos](#) [Planes Especiales](#) [Explore la Isla](#)
[Home](#) / [Explore la Isla](#) / [Nuestra Cultura](#) / [Artistas de Aruba](#)

Explore la Isla

Datos de la Isla

Historia

Educación

Nuestra Cultura

[La gente de Aruba](#)[Idioma](#)[▶ Artistas de Aruba](#)[Música](#)[Hecho en Aruba](#)[El Rincon del Chef](#)[Religion](#)[Vacaciones en Aruba](#)[Museos](#)[Carnaval de Aruba](#)

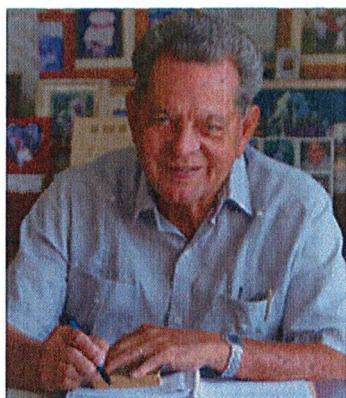
Noticias de la isla

Galería Multimedia

Organizaciones

Artistas de Aruba

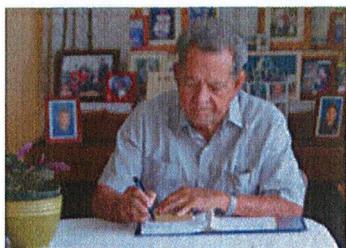
ERNESTO ROSENSTAND



Although born in Santa Marta, Colombia, Ernesto Rosenstand has lived in Aruba since he was 11 years old. Playing soccer and baseball as a young boy, Ernesto quickly picked up the Papiamentu language. In 1950, Ernesto finished secondary school, where he impressed teachers with his writing talent. Several years later, around 1956, he began teaching elementary school; soon after, he was hired to teach Spanish and Papiamentu at the secondary-school level. Ernesto's teaching career was especially noteworthy since he was one of the first Aruban teachers hired on the Island (until then, all teachers were Dutch).

During Ernesto's years of teaching, he became the go-to guy for help in translating written works. Groups began asking him to translate plays from Dutch or Spanish into Papiamentu. He even started writing his own plays: Ernesto wrote three plays in Papiamentu—including a play called Macuarima—for Aruba's theater group, Mascaruba.

In 1970, while serving as the inspector of education for the Netherlands Antilles, Ernesto had the opportunity to meet a Colombian playwright who invited Ernesto to Colombia to learn more about a style of theatre performance being developed there called working theatre. Most of the plays that Ernesto had worked on in Aruba were based on comedy. However, plays performed on the working-theatre stage were more serious in nature, exploring social problems such as alcoholism and abortion. Ernesto was greatly inspired by the depth of these plays and returned to Aruba with these new ideas. In the same year, Ernesto founded his own theatre group, Teatro Experimental Arubano (TEA), which performed plays in the working-theatre style. For TEA, Ernesto wrote six one-act plays and three full-length plays. In addition to TEA, Ernesto also initiated a children's theatre group, called Chi cu Cha, which celebrated the three arts of theatre, music, and dance. Although it is no longer functioning, there has been recent interest in reviving the group.



Ernesto has influenced Aruba's culture as a teacher, translator, and playwright, but also as a writer of books. In fact, Ernesto is a prolific writer, whose works can be found at the library here in Aruba. He wrote two Spanish books and Companashi, a book about growing up in the Companashi neighbourhood in Aruba, for secondary-school students; Cuentanan Arubano, E Sono di Wawa, and Wawa den Mondí for elementary-school children; Tur Cos A Keda Atras for adult readers; and other works including poetry for all audiences. Additionally, UNESCO published a collection of Ernesto's various works in a book called Shinishi di Olvido.

For the past two and a half years, Ernesto has also served as a contributing writer for Bon Dia Aruba, one of Aruba's local newspapers. Once a week, Ernesto fills two pages of the newspaper with fragments of his books, mini Papiamentu grammar lessons, lists of words that are disappearing from the Papiamentu language, and typical Aruban expressions.

Although Ernesto is a humble man, with some urging, he admits that his greatest contribution to the Island has been his help in developing the various professional guilds on Aruba. So skilled in the Papiamentu language, Ernesto was hired to teach Papiamentu to various groups such as the police force, employees of KIA, customs officers, physicians, and teachers. Ernesto recalls how many of these Dutch professionals initially claimed that it was impossible for a Colombian to adequately teach Papiamentu. Ernesto's response was simply, "Let's try." Try he did, and he succeeded.

Today, in addition to writing for Bon Dia Aruba, Ernesto gives private Papiamentu lessons to Dutch doctors. In other words, he continues to help buttress and spread Aruba's unique local language, ultimately helping to maintain the integrity of the Island's rich cultural heritage.

[Volver atrás](#)
[Sala de Prensa](#) [Mapa del Sitio](#) [Contacto](#) [Términos y Condiciones](#) [Política de Privacidad](#)

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